

Washington, DC – Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation that would expand college opportunities and services for low-income Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) students. The bill would provide grants to colleges and universities that have a high percentage of low-income and AAPI students, in a manner similar to federal funding given to historically black colleges and Hispanic serving institutions.

"This bill is an acknowledgement that educational disparities do in fact exist within the AAPI community. It would enable America to pursue her noble goal of equal educational opportunities for all students, particularly for those who fall behind due to socio-economic and cultural barriers," said Congressman Mike Honda (CA-15), Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus.

The College Opportunity and Affordability Act, H.R. 4137, would establish grants to eligible institutions of higher education, designated as Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions, to improve and expand services for low-income AAPI students. Such services may include developing curriculum and academic instruction; enhancing tutoring, counseling, and other student services programs; and establishing community outreach programs that will encourage elementary and secondary school students to develop the academic skills and the interest to pursue higher education.

Institutions that serve large numbers of low-income AAPI students have not previously had access to this aid. Oftentimes societal assumptions categorize the complex AAPI population as a homogenous, academically successful unit that is not in need of academic support systems. This "model minority myth" inaccurately portrays all AAPIs as excelling in school and professional life. In reality, a large number within the AAPI community fall well below national averages with respect to both income and education.

"The creation of the Asian American and Pacific Islander Serving Institutions program was a historic first step, but it was only a first step," said Congressman Wu, Chair of CAPAC's Education Task Force. "I am continuing to work to see that colleges and universities across the country better assist low-income and underserved Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in their pursuit of a college education."

In September of last year, Congressman Wu, a member of the U.S. House Education and Labor

Committee and the Chair of the Education Taskforce of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, shepherded the historic AAPI Serving Institutions program into law with two years of funding. Today's bill would establish the AAPI program as a permanent piece of federal higher education law.